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ABSTRACT

The document offers two definitions of accountability, a narrow one in which the teacher's salary must be based entirely upon a measurement of his teaching competence, and a broader one in which salary is related only partly to a measurement of competence. The major points for and against merit ratings are summarized, followed by a description of the requirements for a successful plan, including the prerequisite conditions of acceptance, mutual confidence, participation, and research; a validated and continuous evaluation system; and a basic scale of salaries which adequately reflects the importance of teaching. The wider acceptance of merit rating plans in the United States than in Canada is considered, as well as the probable cost of such a program, which has been estimated at an additional 18 percent of payroll. The philosophical problem raised by merit rating is due to the conflicting views of the school system as a bureaucracy or as a profession. If the teacher is to be rated by someone else, he cannot retain his professional autonomy. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation has developed a program of teacher accreditation by subject, based on the belief that in accepting the authority for program modification and student evaluation the teacher is also undertaking the responsibility to defend what he is doing and why he is doing it. (MBM)

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ACCOUNTABILITY OF TEACHER PERFORMANCE THROUGH MERIT SALARIES AND OTHER DEVICES *

The present attention being given in educational circles to the term "accountability" appears to have led to a renewed examination of the term "merit rating."

Merit rating, though frequently ill-defined or undefined, is used primarily to describe attempts to relate the amount of a teacher's salary to his competence as a teacher. The single salary schedule (or preparation schedule) has been widely adopted in Canada and in the United States of America as the formula for determining teachers' salaries. The single salary schedule bases the teacher's salary upon two variables: his academic and professional training, and his years of teaching experience. Merit rating involves a third variable -- a measurement of the teacher's competence -- which supplements or replaces the training and experience variables. Narrowly defined, merit rating would mean that a teacher's salary must be based entirely upon a measurement of his teaching competence; broadly defined, it would mean only that his salary is related to some degree, however, minute, to a measurement of his competence. It is evident in the literature that usage inclines toward the broad definition.

Over the years the debate about merit salaries for teachers has ebbed and flowed. At times interest in the concept seems to have disappeared; but before long the idea reappears and the debate is renewed. Despite the avalanche of writing on the topic -- there is little that could be called research -- the major points in the merit rating controversy can be summarized in the following ten statements (2:77-78):

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*An address delivered by Stirling McDowell to the Western Canada Educational Administrators' Conference at Banff on October 9, 1971. Dr. McDowell is General Secretary of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation.

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	Pro's		Con's
1.	Teachers differ in their ability and efficiency; their salaries should be related to these differences.	1.	Differences in teaching efficiency cannot at present be measured with sufficient accuracy for determining salaries.
2.	Merit increments provide an incentive and a reward for superior service.	2.	Merit rating destroys cooperative staff teamwork.
3.	If we can rate for promotion and tenure we can rate for salaries.	3.	Our rating methods are too crude to distinguish among fine gradations of teaching efficiency.
4.	Industry uses merit rating; education can do the same.	4.	Industry and education are not analogous; teaching is an art.
5.	The public is willing to pay high salaries only to those who deserve them.	5.	The public will reject a plan in which only a fraction of its children are taught by superior teachers.
6.	Only through merit rating can teachers attain professional status.	6.	We should seek to improve all teachers, not merely to reward those who appear to excel.
7.	Merit rating will improve instruction.	7.	Merit rating may improve the efficiency of some teachers, but will have an adverse effect on many others.
8.	Merit rating will reward those who deserve recognition.	8.	Merit rating will cause bitterness and disillusionment.
9.	Merit rating will stimulate administrators to be more concerned with the efficiency of their teachers.	9.	Merit rating will hinder effective supervision.
10.	Merit rating will be well worth the additional cost, for it will ensure that money is being wisely spent.	10.	The additional cost of merit rating can be more profitably used in improving the efficiency of the entire staff.

Of all these points, the one that still seems to cause the greatest apprehension on the part of teachers is the question of the validity and reliability of the rating procedures that might be used. The experiment reported by Worth ten years ago is still frequently used as an illustration of the problem that teachers perceive to exist:

> . . . sixty-five principals, participants in Alberta's 1961 Short Course for Principals, were placed in a test situation in which they were required to rate one specific teacher's performance. The subjects "visited", via kinescope, the classroom of Miss Eugenia Walenski, a grade one teacher. The visit lasted about fifteen minutes, just long enough for the observation of one complete lesson. Following the visit, each administrator made an independent appraisal of the teacher.
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> . . . the spread of opinion /on a seven-point rating scale/ with respect to Miss Walenski's performance was considerable, ranging from "EXCEPTIONAL: demonstrates a high level of professional skill" to "DOUBTFUL: has not demonstrated suitability for teaching." Interestingly, sixty-nine percent of the principals evaluated her as generally satisfactory or better while twenty-six percent appraised her as doubtful, weak or barely satisfactory.
>
> It was anticipated that the amount of administrative experience of the individual rater would likely influence his judgment, and hence that there would be differences in ratings according to experience. But such was not the case. Greater administrative experience did not decrease the variation; experienced principals tended to differ in their ratings as widely as their inexperienced colleagues (6:2-3).

In the face of this kind of report, it is little wonder that teachers greet merit rating proposals with considerable skepticism.

Requirements for a Successful Merit Rating Plan

There is certainly no shortage of advice on how to establish a merit rating plan. Surprisingly enough, in view of the general controversy about merit rating, there appears to be considerable agreement about the basic steps a district should follow if it decides to adopt a merit salary plan. A review of the literature shows that the following seventeen guidelines are most often suggested. They may be listed under three headings: prerequisite conditions, the evaluation of teachers, and financing the plan.

Prerequisite Conditions

1. The primary purpose of the plan must be to improve instruction, not merely to penalize unsatisfactory teaching or to require uniformity in teaching methods. The philosophy of the plan must be clearly articulated, and understood by everyone involved.
2. There must be acceptance of the plan by the teachers, the administrators and the school board members. Imposing a merit rating plan will detract from the improvement of instruction. Teachers must recognize a need for the plan and be convinced of its possible benefits.
3. All policy-making and administrative actions must be in harmony with the "merit principle" (specifically, a conscious effort to attract and retain the best teachers available, to provide good conditions of employment, to discover and correct the causes of unsatisfactory teaching, and to provide the supervisory and in-service programmes necessary for continuous improvement in the calibre of teaching service). A merit plan is not a panacea for a district with problems resulting from bad personnel policies.
4. There must be mutual confidence and respect between the teachers and the administrators of the plan. The administrators must have the integrity and courage necessary to make decisions. Obviously, decisions must be made for educational rather than for political reasons; teachers will reject the plan if they think the administrators are being told how the merit increments are to be awarded.
5. Teachers should participate in developing the plan, and there should be almost universal agreement on the criteria for measuring teacher performance.
6. Ample research and planning must precede the implementation of the plan. A merit plan cannot be transplanted from one district to another, but must

be adapted to suit local conditions and decisions. There is no one merit rating plan which has been shown to be superior to all others. A very careful preparatory and training period is necessary before a district can handle the technical and human relationship problems inherent in any comprehensive merit programme.

7. The district should plan to make merit increments available to all teachers who meet the prescribed standards. There should be no quotas, and no requirement for lengthy service before being eligible.

8. The plan should be evaluated periodically; it must be dynamic and experimental, never inflexible or static.

The Evaluation of Teachers

9. There must be developed and validated a set of evaluative standards that can be applied with objectivity and reliability to individual teaching situations. Probably some form of rating sheet should be used. However, appraisal systems that have the appearance of objectivity through the superficial use of numerical scales, or whose reliability has not been demonstrated, are misleading as to their value and will ultimately do irreparable harm to the merit rating plan.

10. Continuous evaluation by teams of evaluators appears to be more useful than irregular evaluations by an individual rater.

11. There must be ample time for the appraisal of teacher performance, an adequate number of properly trained supervisory and administrative personnel to carry out the evaluation, and sufficient assurance that the evaluation results will be thoroughly discussed with the teacher.

12. Evaluation for salary determination should be distinctly separate from evaluation for the improvement of instruction. Those who analyze and evaluate teaching to improve the work of teachers at the school level

should have no direct connection with the salary administration programme.

13. The administrative staff that evaluates teachers should itself be evaluated on the basis of established criteria and measuring instruments.

14. There should be provision for appeal by the teacher against the evaluation results.

Financing the Plan

15. The basic scale of salaries must adequately reflect the importance of teaching.

16. The merit increments must be large enough to provide an incentive, and to justify a careful, systematic evaluative process. The merit increments must not be awarded only sporadically as money is available for them; to do so would seriously undermine any merit rating plan.

17. Sufficient money must be made available to finance the plan adequately. The extensive evaluative programme required and the additional merit increments to be provided will necessarily result in increased expenditures (2:40-44).

There is significance in the fact that during the last twenty years merit rating plans have been established more often in the United States than in Canada. I believe the reason for this difference is that teacher collective bargaining was established in Canada much sooner and much more firmly. When a teacher group has no effective voice in the determination of the salaries its members will receive, it is much more likely to be acquiescent to a proposal that promises to increase the salaries of at least some members of the group.

While merit salary plans have only rarely been established in Canada, the concept has nevertheless been receiving attention and discussion. Last year in Saskatchewan the trustees in one of the ten major bargaining areas

requested an arbitration board to include a merit salary clause in its award. A majority of the three arbitration board members agreed to do so, including in the award provision enabling a school board "to withhold an increment payment due a teacher employed by it if, in its opinion, it had been established by the written reports of the superintendent or director of education or the principal of the school in which the teacher is teaching, that such teacher has unsatisfactorily performed his duties"; and enabling a school board to pay an extra amount of $200.00 to $400.00 to a tenure teacher who "shows outstanding teacher effectiveness in the classroom" and "makes an outstanding contribution to the extra-curricular program in the school" (5:5). However, the teacher representatives successfully challenged the right of the arbitration board to include these provisions, and the arbitration award was subsequently quashed by the courts.

Because of the interest being shown in merit salary scales, however, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation prepared and published a discussion paper entitled "A Multi-Dimensional Method for Determining Salaries" (5:5-6). This paper outlines possible procedures for the introduction of additional dimensions, including a merit assessment, into the traditional two-dimensional salary pattern. Whether the concepts developed in this paper will be adopted by teacher and trustee negotiators remains to be seen.

It is interesting to consider the probable cost of a merit salary program. A 1963 study estimated that the introduction of a successful merit salary plan in a typical Saskatchewan school unit might cost an additional 18 per cent of payroll (2:76). At the present time in the province, based on our $100,000,000.00 teacher payroll, this would be some $18,000,000.00. It is irionic that the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, which officially advocates merit rating of teachers, is presently casting doubt upon the feasibility of introducing a minimum four-year teacher education program because "the initial cost to Saskatchewan taxpayers would be about $10,000.00" (3:1).

A Philosophical Problem

The merit rating controversy arises from a philosophical difference as to the nature of the teaching function in our society. If one views our school system as a bureaucracy he would expect the hierarchical structure and the division of labour to be such that the teacher, at a low level of the hierarchy, would be responsible for a precisely defined set of tasks and would be fully accountable to his immediate superior for performing a specific piece of work using methods and procedures that were clearly right or demonstrably wrong. By contrast, if one views teaching as a profession, he will see the teacher's role as being complex and requiring a high degree of creativity, initiative, independent judgment and autonomy.

The bureaucratic notion would be at one end of a continuum, the professional at the other. Where does teaching fit in? Where should it fit in?

Lieberman makes the following observation:

> A worker on an assembly line may have an extremely important task in the sense that the entire assembly line may break down if he does not perform his duties efficiently, but his duties may require him to make only a few simple decisions over and over again in the entire course of his work . . . .
>
> Professional work presents a radically different picture. The professional worker is confronted by a wide variety of problems which require the application of a high degree of intelligence and specialized training. Lack of autonomy . . . usually does great harm and is strongly resented. Professional work is not amenable to the kind of close supervision often present in factories and offices. Professions necessarily require a broad range of autonomy, that is, freedom to exercise independent skill and judgment (1:3-4).

On this basis professional autonomy and merit rating may be incompatible. In the concept of teaching as a profession, it is essential that the teacher be autonomous, that he be free to apply his specialized training and to exercise his independent skill and judgment. If the teacher is to be rated by someone else, he cannot retain this autonomy. He must, in order to be judged successful, become subservient to the authority and autonomy of the rater.

Teacher Accountability through Other Devices

No one would argue that teachers (or any other professionals) should have such unfettered autonomy that they should never have to be accountable to anyone for anything they do. Indeed, professional autonomy must always be tied to professional responsibility (or, if you prefer, professional accountability).

But if the professional teacher is to be accountable, to whom is he to be accountable? and for what? Most would agree that the teacher must be accountable to the society he serves. Let us first of all realize and admit, however, that society is not a single, monolithic entity that displays an easy consensus on every -- or any -- issue.

In an effort to rationalize the roles and relationships that should exist in the institution of education, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation recently developed a policy on educational program (4). Inherent in that policy is the stated belief that the basic responsibility for establishing the broad aims of education resides with society, and that society through its various agencies has the responsibility to articulate these aims. The two major agencies responsible for articulating these broad goals are the provincial government and elected school boards. Various professionals at the provincial level are responsible for translating these broad, guiding aims into statements of curriculum, which are intended learnings or objectives. And finally, the responsibility for the nature and details of the instructional processes used to attain these intended learnings resides fundamentally with the teacher.

In line with this philosophy, we have developed and implemented during the last six years a program of teacher accreditation. Described as accreditation by teacher by subject, the program is based on the belief that student evaluation must be continuous, and that it can therefore be most effectively carried out by the teacher. The program also assumes, however,

that a teacher should have the option of seeking accredited status, that in accepting the authority for program modification and student evaluation, he is also undertaking the responsibility to defend what he is doing and why he is doing it.

Teachers as a group, through their professional organization, should be responsible for assuring society that each teacher is providing an acceptable level of service. Recent legislation in Saskatchewan extends the responsibility of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation in this regard, making it now responsible for the maintenance of a professional competency committee, in addition to its traditional discipline committee.

There are three agencies that should be involved in ensuring teacher competence. The Minister of Education issues a teacher's certificate. A school board provides a contract of employment. The teachers' professional organization determines eligibility for membership. If any one of the three is terminated -- his certificate, his contract, or his membership -- the teacher ought to be unable to practice his profession. The Saskatchewan legislation has gone a long way toward this ideal.

Summary

Merit salary plans for teachers have been advocated as one means of ensuring that teachers are accountable to society. Most merit salary proposals, however, are mechanistic and minute rather than global and pervasive. As a result, they tend to imply finely graded accuracy where no such accuracy exists.

Of far greater importance than fatuous and misleading attempts to formulate precise descriptions of a specific teacher's effectiveness on a scale with minute gradations is the building of a sense of professional dedication and responsibility within those who are charged with providing the instructional services in our schools.

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